THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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No. 66

1914-18 THE EMPIRE AT WAR

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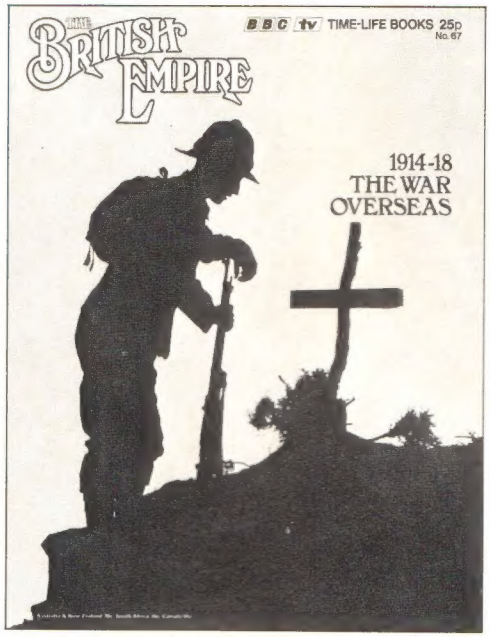

CONTENTS

1821. 1914-18: The Empire at War
The massive contribution of India and the white dominions to Britain's military strength in the First World War.

1826. Picture Essay: Western Front
Glimpses of key actions fought by Empire troops in France and Belgium, serving as reminders that not only Europeans but also distant peoples knew the awful meaning – mud, devastation, human misery – of the words "Western Front".

1842. The Battle and the Honours
War as a catalyst of change and how, although the battle itself was a shared experience, the sharing of the honours loosened the bonds of Empire.

Cover: Epstein's portrait bust *The Tin Hat* captures the weary tenacity of the private soldier.

1914-18
THE EMPIRE AT WAR

A propaganda postcard calls the Empire to shun the white feather of cowardice and fight for King and Country.

On August 4, 1914, Britain went to the help of Belgium and declared war on Germany. The decision was a remarkable act of faith in Empire brotherhood, for Britain had not consulted her Dominions and without their manpower, surplus food and economic strength, she would have been threatened by defeat. The Royal Navy apart, her armed forces were only a fraction of the size of Germany's and the military power of the other Allies was uncertain. But the imperial response outshone all hopes, with an outpouring of blood and treasure which saved Britain in the opening months and sustained her right through the most terrible war then known to history.

by Brian Gardner

In England, it was Bank Holiday Monday; a warm, sultry August afternoon. Straw-hatted men punted on the Thames, while their girls lazed under parasols. Drivers in goggles hurled their roaring cars round the track of Brooklands. Bathing-machines trundled on the crowded beaches. Gin was 6*d*. a double, and cigarettes 5½*d*. for 20. It was August 3, 1914.

In those days, Britain was the greatest power the world had ever known; greater than the Romans, greater than the Mongols. Her Empire covered a quarter of the earth's land surface, and her influence reached to every part of the globe, from North Pole to South Pole, from Vancouver to New Zealand and beyond, into the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. It was a world of British self-confidence and superiority. There was a prospect of war, but it was a prospect which filled people with enthusiasm rather than with dismay. For they did not know that the First World War heralded the end of their Empire and their world.

The Cabinet met in London at 11 a.m. that August Monday and two ministers resigned in protest at Britain's preparation for war. During the afternoon, the House of Commons met in special session, and listened to a long, rambling speech by Sir Edward Grey, who had been Foreign Secretary since 1905. At 5.03 p.m. the Aldershot Command received a one-word telegram: "Mobilize."

Next day, August 4, was another fine, warm day over most of Europe. The French Army, following a master defence plan perfected over many years, moved across France towards the German frontier. The French plan was acknowleged to be foolproof, and the main worry at the War Office in London was whether there would be time for the British Expeditionary Force to get to France before the fighting was over. Crowds waving British and Empire flags gathered at Westminster. In Whitehall, a young man approached a policeman, explaining that he was a deserter from the Royal Marines. "I could not stand by," he said. "I want to do my share if there is a war."

At 2 p.m. a Belgian lieutenant named Picard, peering through his field-glasses on his country's frontier with Germany, saw enemy cavalry crossing the border.

King George V, resplendent in Admiral of the Fleet's full-dress uniform, had worked to strengthen the loyalties of Empire and now saw his efforts generously rewarded.

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Britain had a treaty with Belgium dating back to 1839, which guaranteed Belgian neutrality, and accordingly the British government demanded the German advance should end by midnight, or it would mean war. During the evening, ministers waited in the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. No word of a German withdrawal came. In fact, a grey mass of German Uhlans was already sweeping across the fields of Belgium on a journey which was to change the face of Europe for ever. Because midnight in Berlin was 11 p.m. in London, it was only 11.5 p.m. when the German Ambassador was handed Britain's declaration of war, and the ministers were able to get an early night.

As German power in Europe had increased, the possibility of war had been simmering for years. Britain was in alliance with France and Russia: Germany with Austria-Hungary. After the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo, the Austrians had gone to war with Serbia in July, 1914. Russia was an ally of Serbia, and thus Germany, through its alliance with Austria, prepared for war with Russia. France hastened to honour its Russian alliance. Europe, ensnared by nationalism and pride, rushed to mobilize. When Germany invaded Belgium, it brought Britain inevitably into the war, for it had long been British policy to keep the Lowlands free of the great powers.

The British Empire was something of a mystery to many Europeans, who were inquisitive as to just how strong the oft-mentioned "family ties" really were between the self-governing Dominions and the mother country. Although Britain's declaration of war was legally binding on all her dependencies, there was no reason whatever why countries such as Canada and Australia should actively participate in a quarrel between the Kaiser and the Tsar. Many thought that the far-flung colonials would show little loyalty.

The answer to this uncertainty was given with a speed and force which astonished all Europe, and which is the most remarkable demonstration in its history of the loyalty that did exist in the Empire. In Australia, the Labour Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, declared, "Our duty is quite clear: to gird up our loins and remember that we are Britons." He

Kaiser Wilhelm II, arrogant and aggressively militaristic, symbolized for the British all the worst qualities of the adolescent, insecure German Empire.

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promised to fight "to our last man and our last shilling." The Australian Minister of Defence said, "Australia wants the rest of the Empire to know that in this momentous struggle for liberty and national honour, the vigour of her manhood, the bounty of her soil resources, her economic organization, all she possesses, to the last ear of corn and drop of blood, is freely offered to maintain the glory and greatness of the Empire, and to battle in the righteous cause wherein she is engaged."

New Zealand, like Australia, was socialist: she was considered to be the most socialist state in the world at the time. Female suffrage had existed since 1893. Richard Seddon, who had been Prime Minister for 13 years, was considered positively revolutionary in some quarters, yet he proved himself a staunch imperialist. As a history of New Zealand at war put it: "Telegrams passed to and from the Imperial Government, the Dominion offering, the Mother Country accepting, no unnecessary questions being asked, no stipulations being made: in time of common danger the Empire does not bargain." New Zealand immediately announced the formation of an expeditionary force to Europe, charging itself with the whole cost, including transport. The first troops, nearly 8,000 strong, left New Zealand only ten days after the outbreak of war.

Australia and New Zealand had some personal interest, because of the presence of German colonies in the Pacific, at which both Dominions had long looked askance. Such considerations did not exist in Canada. But the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, had already cabled London, three days before the outbreak of war, promising support, and inviting suggestions as to how Canada could best help. A division of 22,000 men was offered and accepted – the first portion of Canada's massive war-time assistance: in 1916, she promised to raise half a million men. Canada, said Borden, was "united in a common resolve." And so it was. The only difficulties came over the question of compulsory military service in 1917, since the French-Canadian community was against this. Even little Newfoundland, in 1914 a separate Dominion with a population of a quarter of a million, declared itself ready "to assist in every possible way in the justifiable war in which the Empire, of which we are proud to be a part, is now engaged."

The other "white Dominion" was South Africa. There the scars of the Boer War were still unhealed. Could the old enemy be expected to join forces with Britain only a decade and a half after one of the most bitter wars in modern history? The Prime Minister was an old general of the Boer War, Louis Botha. But he, and his right-hand man, Jan Christiaan Smuts, had become firm believers in the Empire, mainly out of pragmatism. In the eyes of many diehard Afrikaner nationalists, they had become "more British than the British." Botha declared South African support for Britain, and promised to take the neighbouring German colony of South-West Africa, and to assist in the taking of German East Africa (now Tanzania). But he did not have all his countrymen with him, and there was even talk of rebellion.

German East Africa was by far the richest German colony overseas, and its conquest seemed the obvious responsibility of the Indian Army, stationed across the Indian Ocean. India was the jewel of the Empire, and the Indian Army, with its magnificent uniforms, its spectacle and display, was considered to be one of the most powerful weapons available to the Empire. It had not been engaged in serious campaigning for generations. The response from India was encouraging. Politicians suspended their controversies. Princes made lavish offers of help, thousands of Indians, though involved in a war about which they knew nothing, swarmed to the colours.

Inevitably, as the Dominions knew well, the major part of the war would be fought in Europe. German strategy was based on the Schlieffen Plan, which involved the capture of Paris in a sweeping movement from Belgium. Germany concentrated about 1,500,000 men on the Western Front, relying mainly on Austria to deal with the Russians. After four weeks of war, the German plan seemed to be achieving spectacular success.

The British Expeditionary Force, of some 100,000 regular soldiers, under Sir John French, reached the front at Mons, in time to delay the German advance there, and at Le Cateau. But the British were obliged to fall back before the fury of the German onslaught, which was only halted at the Battle of the Marne, in September. The Germans retired, and by the end of the year the Western Front had settled down, in a line of wire and trenches, from the Belgian coast to the Swiss frontier: a line that was to remain substantially unaltered for nearly four years, although occasionally dented by great offensives, known as "pushes." As the war went on, the line of fortifications became more sophisticated. The Western Front, on which most of a generation of British, French, and German men died, was to haunt Europe for half a century.

The war of movement that both the Germans and French had planned, had become a stalemate: a war of attrition. The generals and their staffs could think of no other way. As the months passed by, the casualty figures mounted with awful inevitability, neither side seeming to have gained anything, except sometimes a few acres of shell-powdered soil or man-enveloping mud. Most of the time, little or nothing happened on the front line. An occasional shell whooshed overhead. Raiding parties crawled about in the wilderness of no-man's-land, cutting wire or bringing back a prisoner. In the dark, Véry lights momentarily lit the nightmarish scene. The poet Edmund Blunden graphically recalled "the imbecile, narrow, bullet-beaten, but tranquil front line" in his *Undertones of War*:

"Such as it was, the old British Line at Festubert had the appearance of great age and perpetuity; its weather beaten sandbag wall was already venerable. It shared the past with the defences of Troy. The skulls which spades disturbed about it were in a manner coeval with those of the most distant wars. . . .

"In the evenings, while some of the men were amusing themselves in digging out a colony of rats, for which sport they had enlisted a stray terrier, there would suddenly begin a tremendous upheaval two or three miles to the south. . . . The red sparks of German trench mortars described their seeming-slow arcs, shrapnel shells clanged in crimson cloudlets, smoke billowed into a tidal wave, and the powdery glare of many a signal-light showed the rolling fields."

Such was the scene that was to become

familiar to hundreds of thousands of troops from all over the Empire. By the end of the year, contingents from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and India had all arrived in France or Flanders.

Overseas, the German Empire was beginning to fall. Scattered between West, South-West and East Africa, the Pacific and the China coast, it depended for its security on command of the seas. With this in mind, Germany had developed a powerful navy, but Britain was also well prepared in this respect. The colony of Togoland, cut off from home on the west coast of Africa, soon fell to a small force from the Gold Coast. The nearby Cameroons fell in 1916 to a force which included Indian and West Indian troops. West Africa had been a traditional posting for West Indian regiments, since they were thought capable of withstanding the climate, but the campaign in the Cameroons took a fearful toll in malaria.

The Pacific was primarily the responsibility of Australia and New Zealand. Germany held the Bismarck Archipelago, German New Guinea, the Caroline, North Solomon, Marshall and some smaller islands, and Samoa, a total of nearly 100,000 square miles. The German cruisers *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Emden* and *Dresden* were operating in the Pacific. Since Samoa was the main objective of the Royal Australian Navy, which consisted only of a battle-cruiser, a cruiser and a destroyer flotilla, three of the German raiders were able to sail for the Atlantic unmolested, where they were eventually destroyed at the Battle of the Falkland Islands. The *Emden* did not accompany the fleet to the Atlantic; it left for the Indian Ocean where, with the *Königsberg* it caused much destruction among British merchant shipping.

The invasion of Samoa, aided by the Royal Australian Navy, was undertaken by a New Zealand expeditionary force of 1,400 men. The expedition appeared unexpectedly, and the island yielded without bloodshed. Ten Fijians were with the force, and it was one of them who hauled down the German flag.

Fiji was a colony anxious to join the war in a positive way, but denied by reluctant officialdom. It was British policy not to have large-scale recruiting in the coloured colonies; it was felt that the troops would be inferior and unsuited to European conditions, that the colonies could not afford it and that in some cases there was a potential danger in raising and arming forces in colonies ruled by a handful of white men. After repeated requests, Fiji was eventually allowed to raise and send to Europe a "Labour Contingent" of pioneers.

The remaining German possessions in the Pacific and the Far East were taken by Australia, and by Japan, which had entered the war as an ally of Britain. The various centres in the Bismarck Archipelago, notably the communications centre of Rabaul, were taken by the Royal Australian Navy without trouble. Only the wireless station on New Pomerania (New Britain) put up a fight; but it, too, surrendered to the Australians after 18 hours. The large colony of New Guinea, unexpectedly, gave in without a shot. The Australians and New Zealanders had been of great assistance to Britain, destroying the outposts of the German Empire in the East, and thus freeing the Royal Navy for duties in the Atlantic and the North Sea.

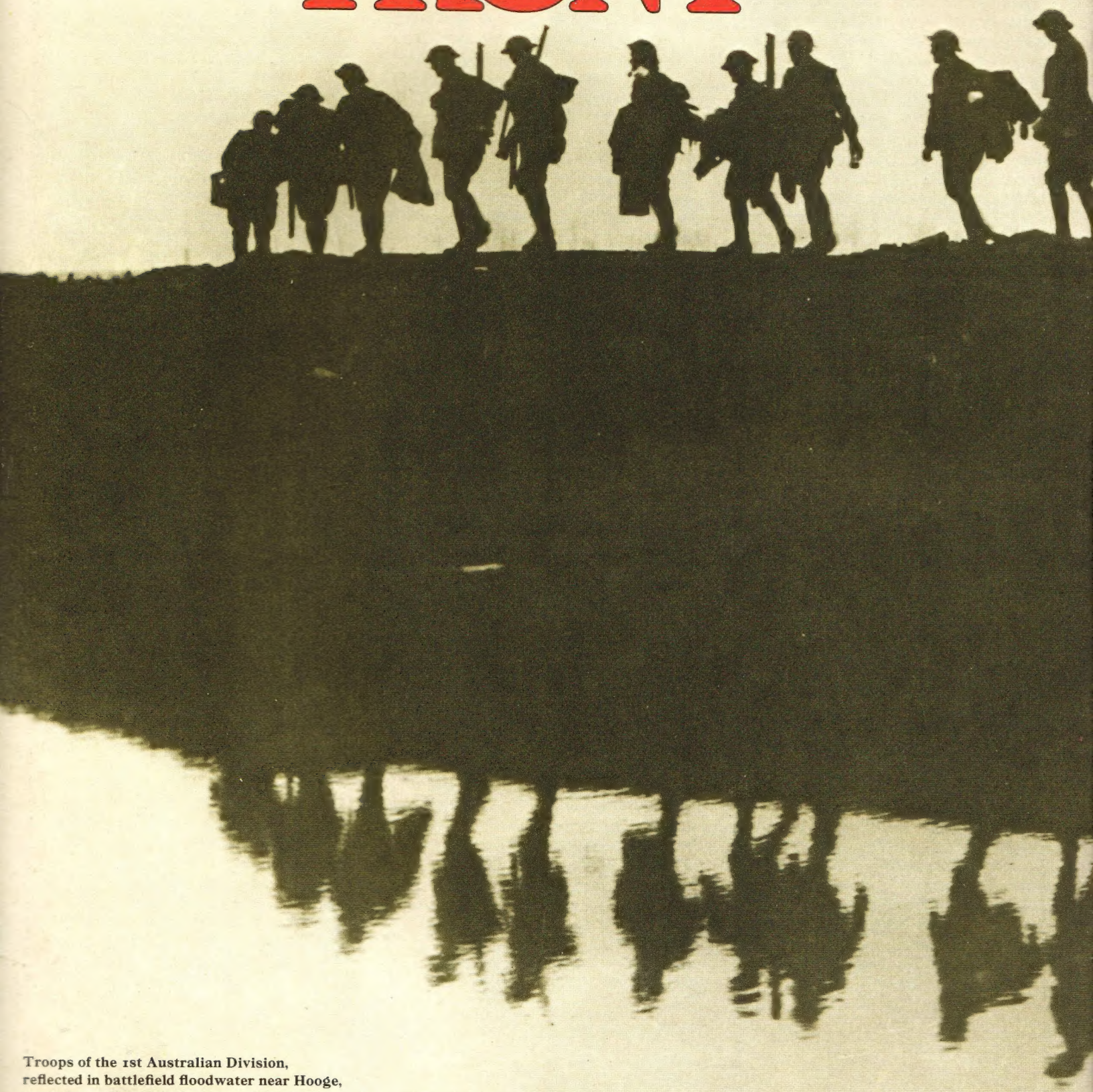
Meanwhile, larger expeditionary forces than the contingents dispatched at the start of the war were being assembled in Australia and New Zealand. The intention was for this force to join the Canadians on Salisbury Plain, for training. However, the shortage of workers made the building of quarters difficult, and the Canadians were already in miserable conditions. At the last minute it was decided that the Australians and New Zealanders, who were already in the Red Sea, should disembark in Egypt, where they could train and from whence they could go direct to the Western Front. The presence of this force in the Near East, some 20,000 Australians and 7,800 New Zealanders, was to have a vital bearing on the Empire's part in the war.

Turkey, as an old foe of Russia, had joined the war against the Allies. The British felt that Russia, which had taken a fearful battering in the war so far, needed some support, and a naval demonstration against the Dardanelles, the straits connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, was suggested. If a fleet could pass through the straits, Constantinople would be at the mercy of the Allies. This project was enthusiastically championed in Whitehall by Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty.

Churchill was frustrated and appalled by the deadlock in the West, and he knew that the plan would give a prominent role to the Royal Navy. Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was also a firm advocate; he wanted to rally the Balkan states against Austria and Turkey. The project received the assent of the War Minister, Lord Kitchener, who decided that since the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (the Anzacs) in Egypt was well placed for the task, they should form the bulk of the invasion force. All this was planned without consultation with the Australian and New Zealand governments, an unthinkable situation in the Second World War. Not only that, but the War Office directed that the Anzacs were to be commanded by an Englishman, Lieutenant-General Sir William Birdwood, soon known to all Australians as "Birdy."

Two British divisions were also in the landings, which were postponed from April 23, 1915, to April 25, owing to the strength of the wind. The project had been badly prepared. Planning had been based on poor and inaccurate maps, and on bad intelligence about the Gallipoli peninsula, where the landings were to be made, and on the Turkish Army. The naval bombardment gave the Turks adequate warning; at some places the Turkish infantry merely quitted their trenches while the bombardment lasted, then marched back again. The enemy commander was General Liman von Sanders, a German seconded to the Turks; he was, as Churchill pointed out, a "highly competent soldier." Von Sanders wrote: "From 5.00 a.m. onwards on April 25 reports of great landings of enemy troops already begun or about to begin followed rapidly one on another. In the south, beginning on the Asiatic side, the 11th Division reported great concentration of enemy warships and transports . . . the roar of continuous open fire was soon plainly to be heard. It was evident from the white faces of the reporting officers at this early hour that, although a hostile landing had been fully expected, its occurrence at so many places at once had filled them with apprehension. . . ."

WESTERN FRONT



Troops of the 1st Australian Division, reflected in battlefield floodwater near Hooge, move forward in October, 1917, during the rains of the costly Flanders campaign.

From all over the Empire, from thriving young towns, lowering forests and sun-baked plains they came – Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Rhodesians, Indians and South Africans – to fight a country which was only a remote threat to their own security. Unhesitatingly, they adopted Britain's cause as their own, struggling out of flooded trenches and dying in shell-blasted battlefields to hold the thinly stretched lines of the Western Front.

Troops of Greater Britain

In August, 1914, Germany launched seven mighty armies in the opening onslaught of four years' total war on the Western Front. Called the Battle of the Frontiers, it was waged along the Belgian, Luxembourg and German frontiers with France, from the Channel to Switzerland.

Neither Britain nor her colonies were ready. She herself had only just mobilized. Except for India, the Empire countries had no big regular armies – only small defence forces 2,000 or 3,000 strong. To play their part in the war to which Britain had committed them, the Dominions had first to enlist raw civilian volunteers, supply their units with uniforms and equipment (recorded in the contemporary war artist's drawings on these pages) and transport their troops over to Europe.

Throughout the Empire, posters and notices in support of the war effort – examples of which are shown on the following pages – were placarded on street corners and splashed across newspaper columns.

In this first call to arms in their histories, the infant democracies of the Empire mobilized faster than autocratic Germany had done. Within two months of the outbreak of war, Canada had armed 30,000 men and embarked them for Britain in a flotilla of 32 ships. Australia at once pledged the aid of her small regular navy and an initial 20,000 troops. To these, New Zealand, with a population of just over one million, added a first contingent of 8,000 men, later building up to a total of 46,000. These forces were the nucleus of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, popularly known as the Anzacs.

The distinction of being the first imperial troops to fight on the Western Front went to the Indians. A well-trained British-officered Indian Corps arrived on the Ypres battlefield in Belgium just in time to reinforce the British at Messines, where two German armies, driving for the Channel, were on the point of breaking through. On October 31, they threw back the enemy infantry and saved the Allied front. Their success was an auspicious start to an Empire war effort that led many to believe in the notion of a Greater Britain, a world-wide British family in which mother country and colonies were harmoniously united.

Australian troops, left to right: Australian Field Artillery, sergeant in marching order; Australian Light Horse, trooper (Egypt, 1916); trooper, in marching order; Australian Light Horse, squadron sergeant-major in undress order.

Indian Army troops, left to right: Signal Service (Palestine); 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles; general (mounted); 2nd Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles, British captain; 2nd Gurkha Rifles; Army Service Corps.

Canadian troops, left to right: 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles; British Columbia Regiment, corporal in fighting order; general (mounted) in winter dress; infantry private in 1915 winter dress.

New Zealand troops, left to right: Engineers, major; Maori infantryman in fighting order; N.Z. Mounted Rifles, trooper; 14th Infantry Battalion.

South African troops, left to right: Scottish Battalion, major; infantry private (German East Africa Campaign); Boer mounted commando (South-West Africa); South African Labour Corps, private.

Exploiting a breakthrough by British tanks, cavalry of 9th Hodson's Horse (otherwise known as 4th Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers) attack under fire near Cambrai in November, 1917.

Indians in the Front Line

Among the battles fought by Indians on the Western Front was a cavalry action at the town of Cambrai, in northern France. Barbed-wire entanglements on the front usually denied cavalry much chance of action, but here special circumstances gave the Indian cavalry a fine opportunity to show its battle skill.

On November 20, 1917, British tanks cut great lanes in enemy wire, infantry broke through across a front four miles wide and, in the wide open spaces so created, the Indian cavalry made a dash for Cambrai – a dramatic though brief advance: the Germans blew up a canal bridge, stalled the attacks and forced the British and Indian troops to fall back. Ten days later, when the British line had been broken by a German counter-attack, the Indian Ambala Brigade – including Hodson's Horse, a unit formed in 1857 during the Indian Mutiny – scattered the Germans in a sharp engagement and subsequently, fighting on foot, took 300 prisoners in an action with the 1st Guards Brigade. For this valuable support, they were presented with a Guards' bugle by the grateful British.

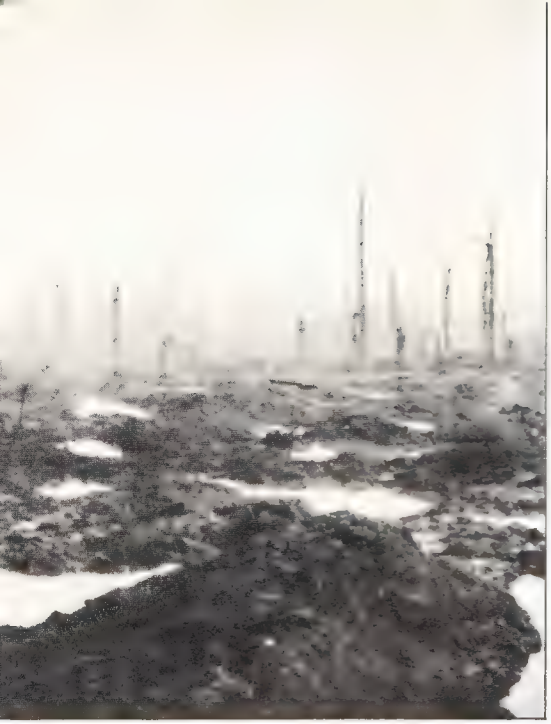
Indian infantry, wearing gas helmets and gas masks to protect them from lethal yellow clouds of chlorine gas, stand ready to repel an enemy attack on a trench front.

Canadian Calvary

Passchendaele, a village lying on a ridge in western Belgium, near Ypres, has a particular place in Canadian memories. During October and November, 1917, 16,000 Canadian troops were killed in the battle to take it and the two surrounding square miles of flooded shell-craters.

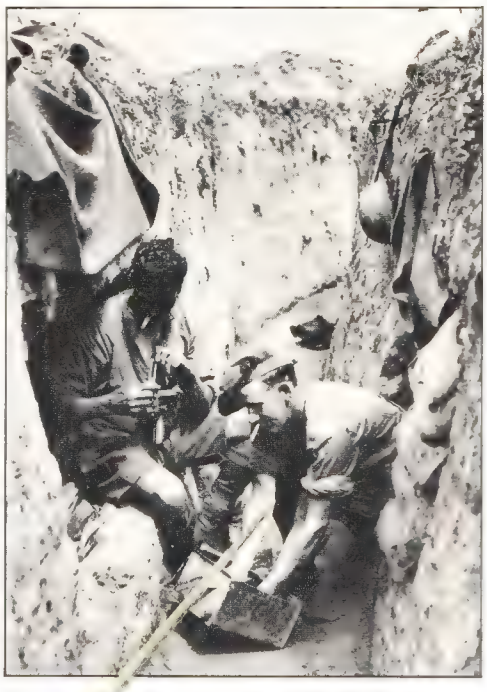
For three years, German guns had pounded the Allied trenches there, but on October 9, 1917, a major Anzac-British-French attack began. After a week, four fresh Canadian divisions were brought in to relieve the Anzacs, who had suffered serious casualties. Under heavy fire, these 20,000 men inched their way from shell-crater to shell-crater, and on October 30, with two British divisions, they began the assault on Passchendaele itself. They gained the ruined outskirts of the village during a violent rainstorm and for five days they held on grimly, often waist-deep in mud and exposed to a hail of jagged iron from German shelling. By November 6, when reinforcements arrived, four-fifths of them were dead. Passchendaele had become a Canadian Calvary.

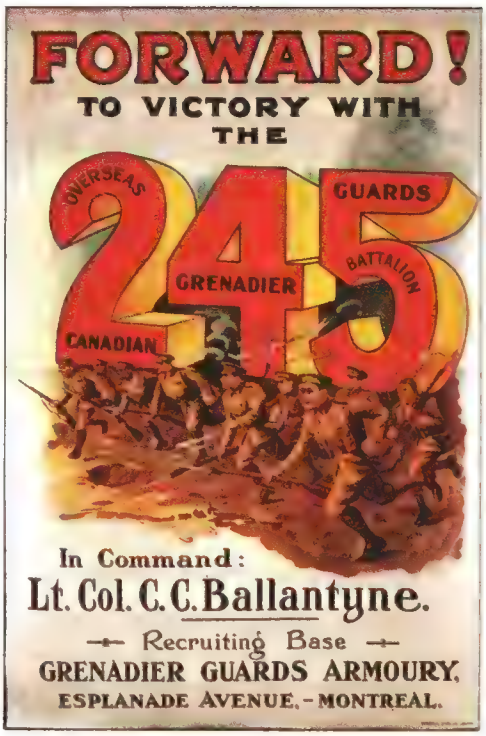
Canadian troops with fixed bayonets leave their trench to charge the enemy near the Belgian town of Menin, during the Flanders offensive of October, 1916. A bullet stops the soldier on the right.



A solitary Canadian officer inspects the flooded Passchendaele battlefield on November 14, 1917, a week after the Canadians had won this ghastly wilderness.

Scottish-Canadian troops in a reserve trench use a pause in operations to clean their Lewis gun at Menin in November, 1917.





MEN OF Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry repel a fierce German attack at St. Floi, near Ypres, in March, 1915.

Australians at the Somme

In the last two years of the war, Australians took part in some of the heaviest fighting on the Western Front, as the Allies inched the Germans back across France and Belgium at extravagant cost in human life.

Their worst experiences came on the Somme sector of the front in 1916. Unending rain flooded the battlefield, trenches oozed yellow, waist-high mud and the front line was cut off from the rear by swamps and lagoons. On November 5, the Australians together with the British and their fellow New Zealanders in 1st Anzac Corps, attacked the town of Bapaume, 76 miles north-east of Paris. It was the appalling weather as much as enemy action which cost them heavy casualties. Supply lorries foundered, so that the guns had no shells. As the troops slithered and fell through a sea of mud, many found their rifles and machine-guns clogged and became easy prey to enemy fire. Others drowned in flooded shell-craters. The attack came to a halt, and after the costly failure of a further attack a week later, the Australian survivors were left to endure a long, bitter winter in the shattered battlefield.

An Australian soldier sleeps in a buttressed front-line trench in June, 1916, with a caged canary beside him. The birds died at the first trace of poison gas and thus warned the troops to don their gas-masks.

Australian machine-gunners fire at enemy aircraft during Anzac attacks in the Somme sector in May, 1917. An officer with binoculars watches the aircraft for hits.

Australian troops take cover on November 6, 1917, in shattered terrain 70 miles north of the River Somme where they joined the battle for Passchendaele, taken by Canadians that day.

Australian signallers pass up a communication trench to lay field telephones on a southern sector of the front in May, 1917, while advancing cavalry cross above them.

New Zealand Makes History

The New Zealanders, including native Maoris whose submission to white civilization had begun barely 100 years before, made a forceful impact on the Western Front. On their first day's fighting – September 15, 1916 – they took part in the world's first tank action. Joining an attack made by the British 4th Army in the Somme battle area, they advanced with the great steel monsters lumbering beside them. When they were held up by wire and machine-gun fire at the second line of enemy trenches, two tanks broke through and knocked out the guns. The New Zealanders went in with bayonets and seized the objective, laughing as the Germans fell back in consternation before the rumbling armour.

A butcher of the Maori Pioneer Battalion prepares the meat ration near Fricourt, on the Somme, in September, 1916. These Pioneers were famed for their doggedness.

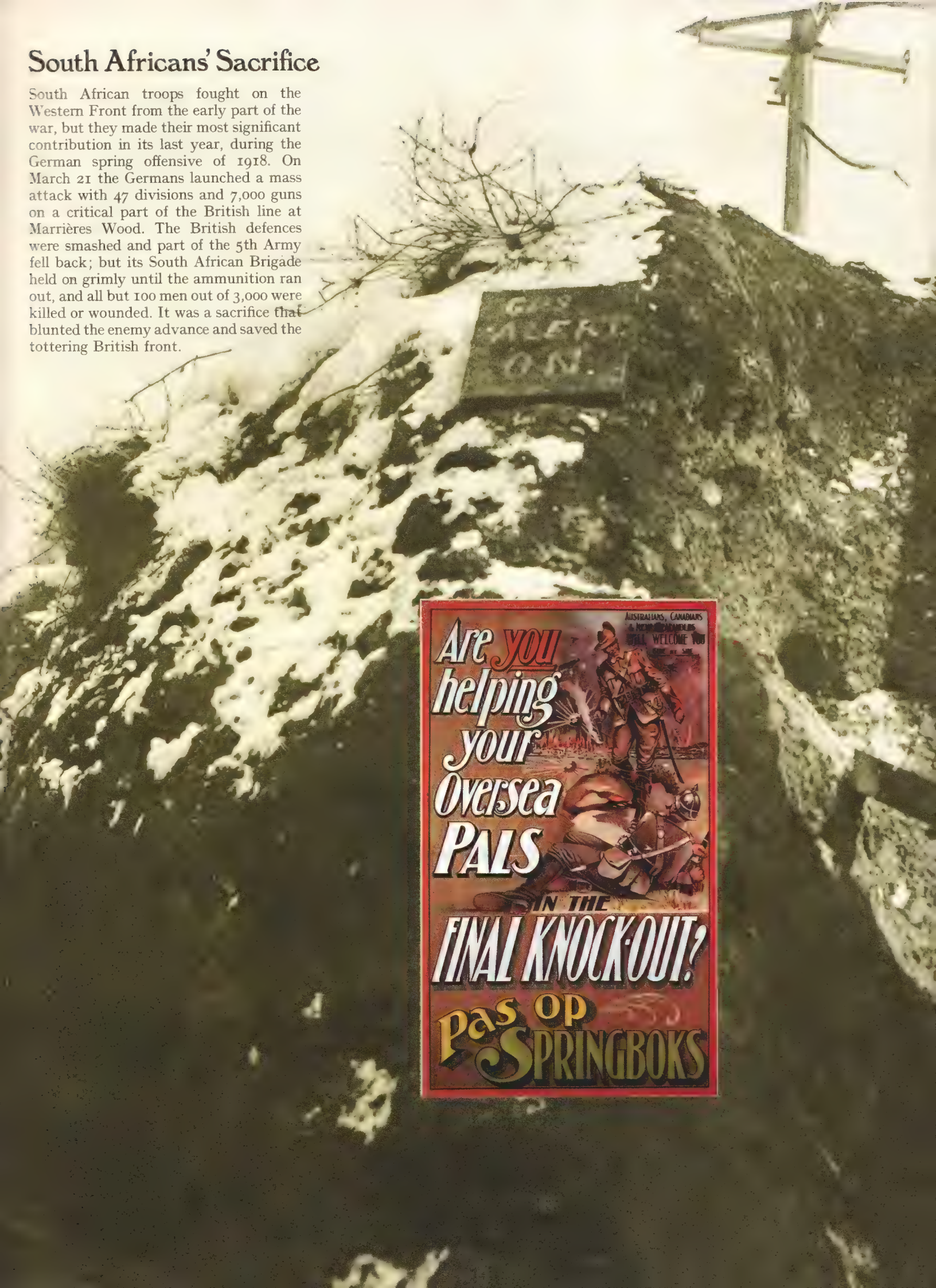
Horse transport of the New Zealand Division's supply column, including a pet donkey, advances up the Albert–Amiens road in September, 1916, while enemy shells scream overhead.

New Zealanders rest beside their loaded lorries while advancing to hold a sector of the Somme battlefield in September, 1916.

New Zealanders receive their rum ration in May, 1916, at Fleurbaix in northern France, a quiet part of the line.

South Africans' Sacrifice

South African troops fought on the Western Front from the early part of the war, but they made their most significant contribution in its last year, during the German spring offensive of 1918. On March 21 the Germans launched a mass attack with 47 divisions and 7,000 guns on a critical part of the British line at Marrières Wood. The British defences were smashed and part of the 5th Army fell back; but its South African Brigade held on grimly until the ammunition ran out, and all but 100 men out of 3,000 were killed or wounded. It was a sacrifice that blunted the enemy advance and saved the tottering British front.



A South African sentry watches wind vanes that signalled the dangers of gas attacks on the Western Front.

II. The Battle and the Honours

As the war dragged on, the importance of the Empire troops' role in battle became increasingly obvious. One of the events which highlighted this was the landing on the beaches of the Dardanelles, near the Turkish village of Gallipoli. It began on April 25, 1915, when about 120,000 men, including a large Australian and New Zealand contingent, splashed ashore through the warm waters of the Mediterranean. Facing them were 200,000 Turks, nearly all of them looking down on the beaches from an elaborate system of trenches on the heights, with machine-guns and artillery. The Australian and New Zealand landing-parties had drifted in strong currents a mile from the intended beach. Instead of a beach a mile long, they found themselves on one not much more than half that size. There had been little preparation, and no one knew what to do. As the Australian writer, Alan Moorehead, wrote: "The simplest of questions was unanswered. Was there water on the shore or not? What roads existed? What casualties were to be expected, and how were the wounded men to be got off to hospital ships? Were they to fight in the trenches or in the open, and what sort of weapons were required? What was the depth of water off the beaches and what sort of boats were needed to get the men, the guns and the stores ashore?"

The troops camped on the beaches, wasting valuable time, while the Turks, who had expected landings at a different beach, moved into good defensive positions. The Anzac beach faced Turkish troops commanded by an able soldier, Mustafa Kemal, Turkey's post-war leader. These soon put up a fierce resistance, and the Australians came under heavy fire in their exposed trenches. By nightfall they had retreated from the advanced positions they had eventually taken up, and had fallen back to a perimeter extending from the coast, packed with men and equipment. A constant stream of bullets and shrapnel broke over their heads.

Birdwood considered an evacuation. He sent a message to General Sir Ian Hamilton, commanding the whole operation. "If troops are subjected to shell fire again tomorrow morning, there is likely to be a fiasco, as I have no fresh troops with which to replace those in the firing line. I know my representation is most serious, but if we are to re-embark it must be at once." Hamilton kept his nerve and replied: "There is nothing for it but to dig yourselves in and stick it out."

The slopes leading up from the beach were covered in rocks and thick scrub, and this made the digging of trenches difficult. The guns of the supporting naval ships were able to give little support, owing to the uncertain position of the front line. The Australians and New Zealanders suffered for three weeks, hanging on to their foothold of coast, always overseen by the enemy from above. The Anzacs now had a beach-head about a mile and a half long at the water's edge, and extending up to 1,000 yards inland. Trenches were sometimes only ten yards away from those of the Turks. To expose your body for an instant meant certain death, and periscopes lifted above the parapets were usually shattered. But the Turks could not dislodge them. Hamilton decided to wait for reinforcements. It seemed it was stalemate all over again.

On May 19, the Turks at last made their effort at Anzac beach. They had 42,000 men, and the orders were to push the Australians and New Zealanders back into the sea during the course of one day and night. Many of the expeditionary force were sick with dysentery and out of 17,000 men, Birdwood had only 12,500 fit for duty in the front line. Most of them were exhausted by claustrophobia, constant danger, homesickness and bad rations. Water, which should have been available as a basic necessity, became the greatest luxury on the beach.

The Turks swarmed towards the dominion trenches for nearly an hour, in wave after wave. They were mowed down as they advanced and few ever reached the Anzac trenches. After nine hours of desperate defence, the attack was called off. Ten thousand Turks had fallen, half of them still lying out in no-man's-land under the blazing sun. Wounded Australians, who had ventured from the trenches, were also lying in the open. The official history records: "No sound came from that dreadful space, but here and there some wounded or dying man, silently lying without help or any hope of it under the sun which glared from a cloudless sky, turned painfully from one side to the other, or slowly raised an arm towards heaven."

Hamilton decided at first not to arrange a truce for the collection of the dead and dying. At length the troops took the initiative themselves, and an Australian colonel raised the flag of the Red Cross. An Australian general, Major-General H. R. Walker, was one of the first to get up and walk into no-man's-land. Some Turkish officers came out to meet him; they exchanged cigarettes, and discussed the situation in French.

The truce continued next day. Compton Mackenzie, one of those who observed it, wrote: "Staff officers of both sides were standing around in little groups, and there was an atmosphere about the scene of local magnates at the annual sports making suggestions about the start of the obstacle race."

During the summer months, conditions on the beaches became almost impossible. Men stripped almost naked, while the fumes of cooking, tobacco, and explosives drifted over the hills, together with the sound of rifle-fire, singing, artillery and flares. On July 3, the Maori contingent arrived to join the Anzacs, 16 officers and 461 men. Before the Maoris did their traditional war-dance, they were addressed by Major-General A. J. Godley, commanding the New Zealanders: "Not only have you to prove yourselves worthy to fight with your British comrades who have done such noble needs, but you have to prove yourselves also worthy descendants of your brave ancestors and of the glorious military traditions of your race."

Sentiment at home was mounting against the operation, and there was pressure to abandon it altogether. Kitchener himself visited the scene of operations in November, and on the 22nd of that month he advocated the evacuation of the Anzac beach and Suvla. Hamilton was ordered home, and Birdwood was placed in charge of the evacuation, carried out with great success.

The Gallipoli campaign had ended in failure, for the straits had not been secured. It was one of the most fiercely fought campaigns in which British Empire troops had ever been engaged, and it is a memorable part of Australian and New Zealand, as well as British, history.

The failure at Gallipoli meant a renewal of the "easterner-westerner" controversy, the latter advocating all resources to the Western Front. Naturally the "westerners" were in a stronger position than before. It was decided by the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Joffre, that a great offensive should be mounted on the Western Front, in the valley of the Somme river. This was scheduled for midsummer, 1916. The Somme sector was one of the strongest German positions on the whole front, and Winston Churchill said it was one of the strongest natural defensive positions in Western Europe. But Joffre, and the British commander, General Sir Douglas Haig, insisted on the attack being made at the Somme, partly because the French and British forces happened to join there, and the attack was to be a combined one, although the British were to take the major part.

The Battle of the Somme got off to a disastrous start. There were nearly 60,000 casualties on the first day, July 1, for a gain of a few hundred yards. The battle proceeded furiously in the following days, but with no success for the Allies. The Germans were too strongly entrenched in deep dug-outs, safe from the Allied bombardments.

On Saturday, July 15, the newly arrived South African Division was ordered to take Delville Wood "at all costs." About half the wood was taken after fierce fighting, but then the enemy trained a barrage of shells on the South Africans. Columns of smoke arose from the shattered debris that was once a peaceful wood. Most of the South Africans in the exposed part of the wood were killed. One survivor said that the area was "strewn every yard with the rags of human bodies." Some of the South Africans clung to life in this hell for five days before being relieved.

There was considerable bitterness among the South Africans, who believed that British troops would have been relieved earlier. Many of them thought that Empire troops got the dirty jobs, because British commanders would not have to answer to dominion politicians. Private J. A. Lawson, of the 3rd South African infantry, wrote: "Smoke and gases clung to and polluted the air, making a canopy impervious to light. . . . Exhaustion did what shell-fire and counter-attacks had failed to do, and we collapsed in our trench, spent in body and at last worn out in spirit. The task we had been set was too great for us."

Delville Wood is now laid out as a memorial to the South Africans.

The Australian and the New Zealand Corps, some of them survivors of Gallipoli, had now also reached the front. On July 23 it attacked the hill-top village of Pozières. This was taken after considerable loss. The Australian *Official History* described the process as "that of applying a battering ram ten or 15 times against the same part of the enemy's battlefront."

Owing to inactivity elsewhere, the Germans were able to deploy enormous fire-power on this one point, much to the dismay of the Australians, who suffered a hellish bombardment in their exposed position. Ragged men lived in holes in the shaking ground. The fumes made a perpetual, vile-smelling fog. The ruins of the village, the orchards round it, bricks, human remains, equipment, were all ground into a grey substance, which from a distance could be seen smoking like a dying bonfire. An Australian survivor recorded: "Nothing but a charred mass of debris, with bricks, stones and girders, and bodies pounded to nothing. There are not even tree trunks left, not a leaf, not a twig, all is buried, and churned up again, and buried again."

Few in the rear had any idea of what it was like in the front line. There was mistrust between the British and Empire commanders. Haig wrote in his diary: "Some of the divisional generals are so ignorant and (like many Colonials) so conceited, that they cannot be trusted to work out unaided the plans of attack."

The Australians were at last relieved at Pozières by the Canadians, another cause for Dominion grumbling. The Canadians achieved glory the following year, during the 1917 spring offensive, when they attacked and conquered the heights of Vimy Ridge. Vimy Ridge remains one of the proudest battle honours in the history of the Canadian Army.

In five days at Vimy, an unprecedented advance was made. On a front of three and a half miles the Canadian Corps overran one of the strongest positions on the entire Western Front, starting from a position that had been dominated by the enemy. It had been achieved by more thorough training and preparation than any previous Allied offensive. The artillery barrage prior to the attack had been a complete success; when the Canadians reached the German trenches, they found them pounded into ruins, and the wire entanglements were a mass of debris.

If the Dominion troops were slowly learning how to cope with the siege warfare of Europe, some said better than the British and the French, the war elsewhere began with similarly hard lessons. The Indian Army, the pride of the Empire, was generally considered one of Britain's most powerful weapons, but there was a reluctance to commit Indian troops to European conditions. It was decided they were to be used mainly against the Turkish forces in the Middle East, and against the colony of German East Africa across the Indian Ocean.

Brigadier-General A. E. Aitken was put in command of an expeditionary force to attack German East Africa from the sea. The first step in the conquest of German East Africa was the occupation of the port of Tanga. In command of the German forces, mostly native troops, was a remarkable commander, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. He made careful preparations half a mile inland to meet the much-vaunted Indian Army.

Aitken's chief intelligence officer wrote of the expeditionary force: "They constitute the worst in India, and I tremble to think what may happen if we meet with serious opposition. The senior officers are nearer to fossils than active, energetic leaders." The expedition, with an accompanying convoy of the Royal Navy, arrived off Tanga in November, 1914. The troops had suffered a wretched journey, made miserable by seasickness.

General Aitken took personal control of the advance, through thick maize and scrub. Owing to the height of the vegetation, it was impossible to see any distance ahead. The heat was intense, and even the Indians were fainting. The 13th Rajputs were to the fore, and as soon as the enemy opened fire, they broke and began to withdraw. The intelligence officer wrote in his diary: "They were all jibbering like terrified monkeys and were clearly not for it at any price." He had

continued on p. 1846

The Ace Pilot from Canada

No less than 8,000 Canadians served either in the Royal Flying Corps or the Royal Naval Air Service, twin British air arms which became the R.A.F. The best known of them was Major "Billy" Bishop (inset), who became the R.F.C.'s top fighter pilot. Bishop began the war in a Canadian cavalry regiment but, as he related in his autobiography, *Winged Warfare*, one day, aged 20 and knee-deep in mud outside the stables in a camp in England, he saw a trim little aeroplane land hesitatingly in a nearby field "as if scorning to brush its wings against so sordid a landscape, then away again up into the clean grey mists." From that moment Bishop resolved to fight the war in the air, not in the mud.

Bishop began his flying career as an air observer. By March, 1917, when he qualified as a fighter pilot, aircraft were numerous and efficient enough on both sides to affect the battle in the field, by "spotting" for the gunners, bombing and reconnoitring behind the lines. Bishop was outstanding at all these, and at aerial dogfights. R.F.C. communiqués credited him with 70 enemy aircraft destroyed during his 20 months of fighting.

Modest and humorous about his achievements, Bishop used to say that his best recollection of the war was how badly his boots squeaked when he was walking across the long hall at Buckingham Palace to receive his medals – V.C., D.S.O., M.C. – from the hands of King George V.

Major W.A. Bishop, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., in the cockpit of a French Nieuport 17 Scout.

A flight of British De Havilland 9a bombers closes up over enemy territory to beat off with concentrated machine-gun fire an attack by German Fokker Triplanes.

to shoot an Indian officer who drew his sword on him when he attempted to stop the rout. Confusion and panic were losing the battle after only a few minutes of action. The unhappy truth was that the Indian troops, expert in ceremonial drill, were completely nonplussed by a kind of warfare for which they had received no training whatsoever.

A few British troops, supporting the Indians, managed to reach the centre of Tanga, and hauled down the German flag. But receiving no support, they, too, had to retire. Further dismay was caused by the emergence of a vast swarm of enraged bees. This was considered a device of the wily von Lettow. (A post-war book erroneously recorded that "canes and wires had been cunningly laid in the bush which, when trodden upon . . . drew the lids from hives of wild bees.")

Soon all that was left of the British line were a few officers fighting lonely, individual battles. The stampede at the beaches led many officers to fire on their own troops. General Aitken, seeing his career and reputation unexpectedly crumbling, himself charged into the fray with his staff, but to no avail. By nightfall it was obvious that the expedition had been completely defeated. One brigade had lost 50 per cent of its officers. No thought of re-embarkation had entered the head of any British staff officer, and consequently no plans had been prepared for it. Evacuation was haphazard and undisciplined.

When the cable announcing the failure reached London, it was a bitter shock to the government. Strict censorship was imposed, and news of the defeat was not released. Lord Kitchener was furious; he forbade decorations for any who had taken part in the affair. The *Official History of the War* describes the little-known Battle of Tanga as "one of the most notable failures in British military history."

Von Lettow remained in control of German East Africa, although cut off from the Fatherland. With intelligence and resource he managed a siege economy. While a new British offensive was prepared from Kenya, he organized the production of soap from wax, bags from palm leaves, and the manufacture of cigars and cigarettes. Rum and whisky (92 degrees proof) were distilled. Efforts, said by von Lettow to have been successful, were made to produce a benzine motor fuel from coconut. Most important of all, von Lettow ordered the production of locally made quinine. With these and other measures, he was able to keep his economy going until the next Allied offensive, in 1916.

One of the last attempts by Germany to make contact with its East African colony was made by the cruiser *Königsberg*, which eventually took refuge ten miles up a channel of the Rufiji river. She was not discovered for several months. Ships of the Royal Navy could not get at her owing to the lack of detailed charts of the labyrinthine delta and the possibility of mines. She was protected by entrenched troops on the surrounding banks, and by shore batteries. The exact position was discovered by seaplanes and a South African big-game hunter, Pretorius, who was brought up from South Africa for the purpose. But it was not for a further six months that the *Königsberg* was bombarded into a useless hulk.

The other theatre outside Europe that engaged the Indian Army was Mesopotamia (now Iraq), a Turkish-controlled province. A division advanced into the territory, up the Euphrates and Tigris, having been landed from the Persian Gulf. Soon there were two divisions and a cavalry brigade, under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, India, some 2,000 miles away in Delhi.

In charge of the probe up the Tigris, to Baghdad, was Major-General Charles Townshend, an eccentric who regaled his troops with violin music in the trenches. No railway existed at that time, and there were no roads. In summer, the ground was hard-baked, and although vast numbers of pack animals were needed the going was comparatively easy. But in winter flooding was a constant danger. Disease was a worse enemy than even the notoriously fierce Turkish soldiers. There was a shortage of medical staff, and a chaotic muddle over medical equipment and stores. The sufferings of both sick and wounded became national scandals in Britain and in India.

Townshend reached the fly-ridden port of Kut with the 6th Indian Division. But he could get no further, as the Turks were well dug in and, according to Townshend, the Indians "had their tails down" because they were so far from the sea. Having lost nearly one-third of his force through casualties, trying to advance on Baghdad, Townshend prepared for siege in Kut, which he believed he could hold for two months with the available food supply. The relieving force was strengthened by the arrival from war-torn France of the 3rd and 7th Indian Divisions, which, predictably, had not settled well to European conditions. But all efforts to relieve Kut were thrust back. After five months, Townshend surrendered.

Command in Mesopotamia passed to the enterprising Lieutenant-General F.S. Maude, who had 107,000 Indian troops under him. A steady advance was made, and by October, 1918, the Turks asked for an armistice. Nearly 16,000 men were killed in battle in Mesopotamia, and 12,807 died from disease.

Across the continent from German East Africa was the sister colony of German South-West Africa. When war started, its conquest was undertaken by the Union of South Africa, with General Louis Botha, the old Boer commander, in command. The German colony was well defended, with a system of blockhouses linked by telephone. The main obstacles for the South African invaders were the desert terrain and the lack of water. Over 67,000 South Africans, all European, were raised for this campaign, which proved to be a quite excessive number. The campaign began with a humiliating reverse for the South Africans at Sandfontein.

The conquest of German South-West Africa was delayed by internal problems in the Union. Many of the Boers were loath to support Britain in the war, to be an ally of one who had so recently been a bitter enemy. Some veteran Boer commanders, including de Wet and Maritz, assembled a force 10,000 strong to defy the Union government. Using German South-West Africa as a base and refuge, and receiving some supplies from there, the rebels attempted to set up a provisional government. They were not supported, and after three months' fierce fighting, the rebellion broke up. About 1,000 rebels were killed or wounded, and the loyal troops suffered 400 casualties.

Nevertheless the feeling against Britain was strong enough to ensure light sentences for what was treason in time of war, and in two years all the rebel prisoners had been released.

The invasion of German South-West Africa was renewed. Botha used Boer tactics and cut off the German retreat into Angola. At the same time Jan Christiaan Smuts advanced on the capital. Another column of 3,000 men, marched nearly 500 miles from Kimberley, crossing the Kalahari Desert through "loose, heavy, heart-breaking sand," transporting its own water – one of the most remarkable feats of the war.

With the conquest of German South-West Africa, South Africa was free to take on von Lettow in German East Africa, and to travel to Europe, where as we have already seen they played a leading part in the horrors of the Somme in 1916. In command of the Union expeditionary force to Kenya, for the conquest of the redoubtable von Lettow, was Smuts – a short, well-knit figure, red beard streaked with grey beneath his red-banded British general's cap. He quickly galvanized the campaign. In less than 24 hours after his arrival he went off on a personal reconnaissance, close to the enemy lines. On his fifth day he cabled London that he was launching an immediate offensive into German East.

Smut's three divisions consisted of South African, East African, Indian, Rhodesian and British troops. Some people expressed surprise at the number of Boers in the force. Smuts, and his second-in-command Jacob Louis van Deventer, had themselves been fighting, only a few years before, many of the senior British officers they now commanded. Van Deventer's husky speech – he spoke little English – was the result of a British bullet in his throat. Why did the Boers fight at all? One of the Boer volunteers gave as his reason for joining up: "I had no animus against the German people, but I thought a victorious Germany would have been a disaster." Another said: "Though we would sooner be under British rule than German we do not love the British. Our dream is eventual independence. We all hope that when this war is over we shall receive it." (At this time South Africa was a self-governing dominion, but it owed allegiance to the British crown.)

Smuts soon discovered that von Lettow, hopelessly outnumbered, did not want an open battle, which might end the campaign in one stroke. Brilliantly, the German commander harassed the invading force as it pushed forward into German East. Smuts' main problem was disease. The capital, Dar-es-Salaam, was not occupied until September, 1916. Soon afterwards Smuts declared the campaign over, much to the chagrin of his successor, for von Lettow was still very much in the field. The German was pushed out of his own colony altogether, and by the time of the armistice, his still undefeated force, the last German force to surrender in the war, was deep into British territory in Rhodesia and threatening Salisbury. He had brought against him an army of 130,000 men, and had incurred an expenditure by the British government of £72,000,000 (more than the Boer War had cost). Of the South African and British casualties of 62,220, 48,328 were from disease. (Von Lettow himself died in 1964, aged 93.)

Smuts had gone to London, where he became the Empire spokesman. It was felt that the presence of a senior statesman and soldier of the Empire in the war councils was somewhat overdue considering the part Empire troops were playing in the war. Smuts took a leading role in the old controversy between "easterners" and "westerners," coming down on the side of the latter. By now the "westerners" were in an impregnable position, and even the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, an "easterner," was unable to remove the phlegmatic Douglas Haig, who was still pushing away at the German line. At the same time a naval blockade had been mounted on Germany, and this was aided by the freeing of the Royal Navy vessels from the East which was patrolled by the Royal Australian Navy.

The year of 1917 saw the worst battles yet on the old front line, with the notorious battles of Third Ypres, especially that for the little village of Passchendaele, whose name became a synonym for misery in war. The Australians began the battle successfully at Broodseinde, which, according to an official history "was held by many at the time to be the most complete and crushing success which the British Army had up to that day obtained during the war. But the Australians made little progress before Passchendaele, which was protected by a sea of mud, and they were withdrawn and replaced by the Canadian Corps.

By now the Canadians had an enviable reputation for efficiency in attrition warfare. One account records that "the name of Passchendaele still arouses bitter memories in Canada, for here, amid indescribable miseries, seemingly to win part of a ridge which a few months later was given up almost without fighting, 16,000 Canadian casualties were incurred." This, however, compared well with the 30,000 Australian casualties in the same sector previously. The Canadians complained of lack of artillery support, and their commander, General Sir Arthur Currie, informed G.H.Q. that 100 guns were missing. He was assured that he must have the indents – consignment slips – for them. Currie replied that he "could not fight the Boche with indents."

Despite the efforts to wear down the German Army in 1917, it succeeded in breaking through the British line in 1918, and nearly reached Paris. South Africans, Canadians, New Zealanders and Australians all played their part in this withdrawal, and then the final advance of 1918 that led to the end of the war in November, 1918.

It had been the most terrible war in human history. Over 8,500,000 had lost their lives, more than half of them from the Allied powers. The British Empire had lost 908,371 dead, the flower of a generation. The war had been won by overwhelming manpower and economic strength, especially after America's entry.

The fine phrases of the Empire premiers in 1914 seemed a long way off, and although common experiences in the struggle had strengthened bonds of loyalty on a personal level, the end of the war heralded a new age for the Empire. For now, the dominions were battle-scarred veterans, wearing the honours of a major war. After their sacrifices, they at least believed themselves to be the equals of Britain. The Empire appeared to be more powerful than ever before, but its senior members would never be subordinate to Westminster again.

THOUSANDS OF GERMAN prisoners at Abbeville in August, 1918, show relief at being out of the trenches. Most had been captured by the ten Empire divisions which made up two-thirds of the British 4th Army.

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